

✓ELDER HEALTH TIPS✓

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Seniors and Gambling: Only A Game?

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Gambling and Seniors:

Gambling, or playing a game of chance for money or other stakes, has become a popular activity for people of many ages and seniors are no exception. While experts agree that most adults can gamble without a problem, the Harvard Medical School, Division on Addictions, finds that about 5% of the general population become problem or compulsive gamblers.

Gambling opportunities for Massachusetts' residents have increased during the past 10 years. Lotto, instant games, casinos, sports betting, simulcast racing and Internet sites are more available than ever. The increase in the number of individual cases of problem and compulsive gambling corresponds to the increase in availability of gambling opportunities. Current estimates show that between 205,000 and 310,000 Massachusetts residents have had gambling problems and many of these are older adults.

Gambling among older adults is different from gambling in younger age groups for the following reasons:

- Many older adults do not understand addictions
- Older adults may be drawn to gambling to fill their time or to be with other people
- Older adults who have gambled away their pensions and savings may have little chance of getting their money back
- Older adults may be more likely to hide their gambling because of the stigma associated with it
- Many older adults have suffered some type of loss such as death of loved ones or isolation from family and friends; gambling may help fill that loss
- Some older adults may have cognitive impairment that interferes with decision-making
- Many older adults are living on a fixed income or have access to a lifetime of savings

Problem Gambling - Signs and Symptoms:

Take a moment to read the following signs and symptoms. Think about whether you or someone you know may have a gambling problem.

- Gambling to calm nerves, forget worries, or reduce depression
- Losing interest in other things such as food
- Talking about, thinking about, or planning to gamble and not doing other activities
- Lying about gambling habits
- Gambling alone or gambling more often
- Going without basic needs in order to gamble
- Needing to gamble more and more money in order to get the desired effect
- Often acting angrily
- Having financial problems caused by gambling

In addition, there are some other factors that may put someone at risk for developing a problem. For example, these may include:

- A family history of gambling
- Repeated chances to gamble
- Difficulty managing feelings
- A desire to gamble to escape feelings
- A substance abuse or other addiction
- Depression or anxiety

If you think you or someone you know may have a gambling problem, help is available. Untreated problem gambling can cause serious physical and emotional problems, especially in the older population. For example,

many physical ills, like heart disease and depression, can worsen with the increased stress of problem gambling. In addition, gambling can affect retirement savings as well.

FINDING HELP:

Gambling treatment can help with some or all of the following:

- Finding hope
- Reducing financial pressures
- Getting one's self-esteem back
- Coping with guilt or shame
- Gambling cessation
- Coping with urges and cravings to gamble
- Gaining the trust of other people
- Developing healthy relationships

Massachusetts has resources that can help older adults with problem gambling. For further information, please call:

**Massachusetts Council on
Compulsive Gambling at-
1-800-426-1234 or 617-426-
4554**

**Kit Clark Senior Services in
Boston 617-825-5000, x 119**

Helpful websites include:

www.state.ma.us/dph

www.masscompulsivegambling.org

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Limited copies of this publication may be obtained from the Office of Elder Health, Bureau of Family and Community Health, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 617-624-5411.

